DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 344 CG 021 920

AUTHOR Canfield, Lori Annette; Green, Charles W.
TITLE Situational Stressors and Childhood Abuse as Predictors of Frequency, Type and Severity of Abuse Against Battered Women.
PUB DATE May 89
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (61st, Chicago, IL, May 4-6, 1989). Many pages have some light print.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Battered Women; *Child Abuse; Experience; High Risk Persons; Marital Instability; *Predictor Variables; *Sexual Abuse; *Stress Variables; Victims of Crime

ABSTRACT

According to social-psychological theory, violent acts in a marital relationship can be understood by examining environmental stressors and violent acts spouses experienced as children. Because there is a great variety in the type and frequency of abuse suffered by battered women, it is important to examine abuse type and abuse frequency simultaneously to identify women at risk for severe abuse. This study examined whether there is a subset of abuse predictors which are especially useful in predicting abuse severity and its components. Subjects (N=105) were battered women at a women's crisis center. Data were gathered by structured interview upon admission to the center. Variables in the areas of situational stressors and childhood abuse that were found to be predictive of spouse abuse in previous research were investigated to determine their value in predicting abuse type, abuse frequency and abuse severity. Multiple regression analyses indicated that alcohol/drug use predicted abuse type, client employment level predicted abuse frequency, and both alcohol/drug use and sexual abuse of the women during childhood predicted abuse severity. Some subjects also completed questions concerning their experience with marital rape. Their responses indicated that marital rape was a widespread problem with serious consequences for battered women. (Author/ABL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED310344

Situational Stressors And Childhood Abuse As Predictors Of Frequency, Type And Severity Of Abuse Against Battered Women

Lori Annette Canfield And

Charles W. Green

Hope College Of Holland, Michigan

CG 021920

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lori Canfield

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Running head: SEVERITY OF ABUSE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Situational Stressors And Childhood Abuse As Predictors Of Frequency, Type and Severity Of Abuse Against Battered Women

Abstract

Battered women at a women's crisis center (n=105) were studied. Data were gathered by structured interview upon admission to the center. Variables in the areas of situational stressors and childhood abuse that were found predictive of spouse abuse in previous research were investigated to determine their value in predicting abuse type, abuse frequency and abuse severity. Multiple regression analyses indicated that alcohol/drug use predicted abuse type, client employment level predicted abuse frequency and both alcohol/drug use and sexual abuse of the woman as a child predicted abuse severity. Some subjects also completed questions concerning their experience with marital rape. Their responses indicate that marital rape is a widespread problem with serious consequences for battered women.

According to social-psychological theory, violent acts in a marital relationship can be understood by examining environmental stressors and violent acts spouses experienced as children. Much of the literature on predictors of abuse examines different abuse types (Steinmetz, 1977; Gelles, 1978; Bowker, 1983; Roy, 1977; Straus, 1983) and several studies report measures of abuse frequency as well (Roy, 1977; Bowker, 1983). However, none arrive at a measure of overall severity by combining abuse type and abuse frequency. Because there is great variety in the type and frequency of abuse suffered by battered women, it is important to examine abuse type and abuse frequency simultaneously in order to be able to identify women at risk for severe abuse. The present study was formulated to determine whether there exists a specific subset of abuse predictors which are especially helpful in predicting abuse severity and its components, abuse type and abuse frequency.

Several situational stressors are consistently found to be predictive of abuse. Although wife abuse is not confined to the lower socioeconomic levels, abuse is more prevalent for those of low socioeconomic status (Gelles, 1973; Prescott and Letko, 1977). Men who are unemployed or employed part time are more likely to batter their wives than those who are employed full time (Prescott and Letko, 1977). Violence is also worse when a woman earns a higher wage or attains higher education than her

spouse (O'Brian, 1971; Hornung, et al., 1981). Husbands of battered women have less education than those of "non-battered" women (Parker and Schumacher, 1977). Education of both husbands and wives is found to correlate negatively with spouse abuse (Bowker, 1983; Hofeller, 1982). However, Straus (1980) found this to be true for those educated to at least the high school level, but found men with educations of eighth grade or less to be less abusive. The presence of many children was found to predict violence (Bowker, 1983), and Yllo and Straus (1981) found that cohabiting men were more violent than husbands.

The use of alcohol or other drugs by the assailants was found to correlate with abuse (Bowker, 1983; Roy, 1977). Gayford (1975) found that for 44% of battered women studied, violence occurred regularly when her husband was drinking. Roy found that 85% of the violent husbands had alcohol or drug problems and that these men were likely to beat their wives whether or not they were under the influence. However, 80% of the occasional drinkers were likely to beat their wives only when under the influence.

The relationship between childhood abuse and later battering appears to be stronger for assailants than for their victims. In a study of attitudes towards interpersonal violence, Owens and Straus (1975) found a relationship between both violence observed and violence received by an assailant as a child and his later approval of interpersonal violence. For women, the correlation

between both violence observed and violence received in childhood and later approval of violence existed, but was much weaker.

Existing research indicates a strong relationship between violence in a man's family of origin and his subsequent abuse of his wife. Fagen et al. (1983) found that 45% of assailants had been abused as children. Roy (1977) reported that 81% of assailants had experienced violence as a child and Carlson (1977) found that approximately half of batters had come from violent homes.

The relationship between a woman's abuse as a child her abuse as a woman is less clear. In a comparative study, Parker and Schumacher (1977) found no relationship between a woman's being abused as a child and later being beaten by her husband. Roy (1977) found 33% of battered women were abused as children and Walker (1983) found 48% of battered women were sexually abused as children.

However, there is a much clearer relationship between a woman being raised in a home in which she observed her mother being battered and later being battered in her marriage. Gayford (1975) studied battered women and found that 23% had models of violence regularly occurring in their childhood families. In a study of both battered and non-battered women, Parker and Schumacher (1977) found that women raised in homes in which their mothers were battered were significantly more likely than other women to be battered by their husbands. Furthermore, they

identified a subset of women who had been victims of spouse abuse but had ended the abuse by either leaving their batterer or informing him that they would leave if the abuse continued. There was significantly less violence in the families of origin of these women than there was in the families of women who were still being abused by their husbands. Thus, although the relationship between childhood and adulthood abuse of women is unclear, a relationship between witnessing battering between parents and later victimization is apparent.

It is important that counselors in women's crisis centers are aware of the predictors of the most severe spouse abuse when assisting battered women in making choices concerning the future of their relationships with their husbands. They must also understand their client's experiences and attitudes concerning marital rape so that this problem can be fully addressed by crisis centers. In the present study, we looked for predictors of severe abuse and its components, abuse type and abuse frequency. Data on marital rape were also collected.

Method

Subjects

Battered women admitted to a women's crisis center between December 1, 1987 and June 30, 1988 were studied. One hundred sixteen subjects were admitted during this period; eight were removed from the sample because the incorrect intake form was used upon their admission and three because they were not

battered women. The final sample size was 105.

Ninety-one percent of the subjects lived within 40 miles of the crisis center which is located in a Michigan city of 50,000. Sixty-two percent were admitted for counseling, 38% for shelter. Subject ages ranged from 17 to 58 years ($\bar{x}$ = 31).

Procedure

Upon entering the shelter or counseling center, each subject was given a structured interview by a center counselor. The interview was based on an intake form that consisted of various situational and historical questions about the battered woman and her assailant. The intake variables investigated to discern their predictive significance were the woman's level of employment, the use of drugs and/or alcohol during battering, the woman's education, the number of children living with her, the woman's exposure to abusive parents and her childhood sexual abuse. These variables had been found to be contributors of abuse in previous studies.

Two new variables were formulated from the intake information: abuse type and abuse severity (see Table 1). Abuse type was an index of the method of abuse and the injuries incurred as reported by the subject. Abuse severity, a combination of abuse type and abuse frequency, was determined by adding the abuse frequency that was reported by the subject and the abuse type score. Multiple regressions were then done to

determine the accuracy of the intake variables in predicting the three components of abuse: abuse type, abuse frequency and abuse severity.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The subjects were 88% Caucasian, 9% Hispanic and 3% Black. Seventy-six percent had earned their high school diploma, 19% had some form of higher education and 46% were employed at least part time. Ninety percent were married to or living with their assailant and seven percent were abused by a former spouse or boyfriend. Subjects had been living with their assailant for an average of six years. Children of the subjects were quite young; the average ages of their oldest and youngest children were 5 and 3 years, respectively.

The assailants were less educated than the women in the sample; 60% had graduated from high school and 13% had post high school educations. Thirty-three percent had less education than their wives, whereas only 15% of the women were less educated than their husband. Twenty-eight percent of the assailants were reported by the subjects to have abused their children. Drugs and/or alcohol were used by 50% of the assailants in battering incidents.

Abuse was a part of the childhood of many subjects; 29% had witnessed abuse between their parents; 35% were sexually abused and 19% were physically abused as children. Although only 60% of

the subjects responded to the question, 51% of these reported that their assailant had been abused as a child.

As adults, the majority of women in the sample were exposed abuse quite often. Ninety-seven percent were exposed to emotional abuse; 72% on a daily basis, 20% weekly. Thirty-one percent were physically abused once a week or more, 16% once a month and 27% three to four times per year. Fifty-two percent reported that they had been victims of abuse for five years or longer.

The most frequent method of inflicting physical abuse upon the subjects was the use of the hand of their assailant (83%), while 42% were assaulted with an object and 32% were assaulted sexually. Over half of the subject's assailants had threatened to kill them. The most frequent injuries received were cuts (72%), while 40% were choked.

Regression Analyses

After determining frequencies and means, three multiple regressions were done to determine which intake variables were predictive of type, frequency and severity of abuse (see Table 2). When the multiple regression was run, the sole significant predictor of abuse type was the use of alcohol or drugs during the battering incident; abuse was more severe when alcohol or drugs were used by the batterer. The frequency of abuse was found to be predicted significantly by the client employment level, perhaps because employed women were with their husbands

fewer hours each day. Women employed full or part time were abused less frequently than those unemployed or not employed. Abuse severity was predicted significantly by both the presence of drug/alcohol use during battering and the woman's childhood sexual abuse.

Marital Rape

A short set of questions was included in the intake in an effort to gather information concerning the experience of sexual assault in the marital relationships of battered women. These questions were optional; 38% of subjects completed the set.

Virtually all of the women in our sample (95%) felt they had the right to say "no" to sex when they did not want it and 60% reported they were able to communicate this to their partner. Sixty-one percent said it was difficult to say no because of the consequences (guilt trips, beatings, etc.) and 19% because he would get angry and force them to have sex anyway. Almost half (48%) of the subjects said they had been forced by their husband to have sex, but only 27% labelled this as rape. Finally, the data that were collected indicate that this is a significant issue. For at least 46% of the women marital sexual assault was at least part of the reason they sought aid at the crisis center.

Discussion

The fact that alcohol/drug use during battering is correlated with abuse ranking high on the abuse type scale is not surprising due to the decreased inhibition associated with

intoxication (Stuart & Sundeen, 1983). The assailant is usually the primary user of alcohol/drugs during battering; like Bowker (1983), we found just a fraction of women admitted to alcohol/drug use at the time of the battering incident. It appears that the assailants use abuse types higher on the abuse type scale when under the influence than they would when alcohol/drugs are not a part of battering. Because a large percentage of assailants have been found to have alcohol/drug problems (Roy, 1977), substance abuse is an important issue in the victimization of women by their husbands.

Alcohol/drug abuse's relationship to severity of abuse is probably the same as it is for abuse type. The relationship of abuse severity to sexual abuse as a child is more difficult to explain as little other research considers the relationship of childhood sexual abuse to battering. It is possible that childhood sexual abuse impairs the woman's self-esteem to the extent that she is less likely to leave the abusive situation even though the abuse she is suffering is very severe. However, it is important to remember that the woman is the victim, not the instigator of the abuse. This area needs further study as it has implications in treatment of both battered women and survivors of incest. This finding has implications in survivors of incest counseling, as the women who are both incest and battering victims are being subjected to the some of the most dangerous abuse. Underscoring their ability and right to be part of non-

abusive relationships could be a goal of counseling for many such women.

Unfortunately, many analyses we had planned to conduct could not be done due to a large amount of missing data, mostly concerning the woman's assailant. Carlson (1977) also encountered a large degree of missing data when asking women to report specific information concerning their assailants; it appears that this is an unsatisfactory and potentially unreliable method of gathering these data. It is important that assailants be targeted specifically in future studies to be better able to understand and prevent battering.

Although there was a low rate of participation in the marital rape section of the intake, there is reason to believe that respondents were representative of the larger sample. On the general intake form, 32% of the sample reported having been sexually assaulted by their assailant. An equal percentage on the marital rape section admitted to having been raped by their husband. This implies that the subject set that responded to the marital rape questions is similar to the general sample.

It is important to note that virtually all of the women who responded to the set of marital rape questions believed it was their right to say "no" to unwanted sex and that the majority were able to communicate this, but that almost half reported their husband had forced them to have sex with him. Although many were reluctant to label it as such, forced sex is, in fact,

rape. Twenty-two percent of the women in the present study who admitted to having been forced to have sex by their husbands did not label it as rape. This is a much larger number than found in another study (Frieze, 1983) in which only 9% of those forced to have marital sex did not identify the force as rape. This may be because our subjects were mostly women from rather conservative small cities (Frieze's subjects were residents of Pittsburgh) and perhaps less likely to label any type of marital sex as rape. It is likely that marital rape is a relatively new concept for many people. However, attention to marital rape in abusive marriages must not be ignored as "rape by one's husband leads to even worse consequences than 'only' being battered" (Frieze, p. 552).

Education concerning marital sexual rights is a primary need, especially in small cities. Help for marital rape victims could include marital rape being freely discussed in counseling situations with battered women, the incorporation of more rape counseling into programs for battered women and the prosecution of husbands who rape their wives. It appears that women are aware of their right to decline sex with their husband and that many are able to use their right through communication of their wishes, but that they do not view the violation of their wishes as rape. It is vital they understand that being forced to have sex with their husbands against their will is a violation of their rights, is a crime, and is rape.

In summary, there exist predictors of abuse type, abuse frequency and abuse severity, and the knowledge of these can prove helpful to counselors in women's crisis centers. Marital rape often accompanies battering, compounding the suffering of many battered women. Increased education about marital rape along with awareness and understanding of this crime's severity will help to raise the quality of life of battered women.

Bibliography

Bowker, L.H. (1983). Beating Wife Beating (pp. 19-62). Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books.

Carlson, B. (1977). Battered Women and Their Assailants. Social Work, Nov., 455-460.

Fagen, J.A., Stewart, D.K., and Hansen, K.V. (1983). Violent Men or Violent Husbands? Background Factors and Situational Correlates. In D. Finkelhor, R.J. Gelles, G.T. Hotaling, and M.A. Straus (Eds.), The Dark Side of Families (pp. 49-67). Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Frieze, I.H. (1983). Investigating the Causes and Consequences of Marital Rape. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 8, 3, 532-553.

Gayford, J.J. (1975). Wife Battering: A Preliminary Survey of 100 Cases. British Medical Journal, 1(Jan.), 194-197.

Gelles, R.J. (1978). Wife Beating: How Common and Why? Victimology, 2(3/4), 443-458. Cited in D.H. Olson and B.C. Miller (Eds.), Family Studies Review Yearbook (p. 242). Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Hofeller, K. H. (1982). Social, Psychological and Situational Factors In Wife Abuse. B&E Research Associates, Inc.: Palo Alto, California.

Hornung, C.A., McCullough, B.C., and Sugimoto, T. (1981). Status Relationships In Marriage: Risk Factors In Spouse Abuse. Journal Of Marriage and the Family, 43, 675-692.

O'Brien, J. (1982). Violence in Divorce-prone Families. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 33, 692-698.

Owens, D.J. and Straus, M.A. (1975). The Social Structure of Violence in Childhood and Approval of Violence as an Adult. Aggressive Behavior, 1, 193-211.

Parker, E. and Schumacher, D. (1977). The Battered Wife Syndrome and Violence in the Nuclear Family of Origin: A Controlled Pilot Study. American Journal of Public Health, 67, 760-761.

Prescott, S. and Letko, C. (1977). Battered Women: A Social Psychological Perspective. In M. Roy, Battered women: A Psychosociological Study Of Domestic Violence (pp. 72-96). New York: VanNostr and Reinhold Company.

Roy, M. (1977). A Current Survey Of 150 Cases. In Roy, M. (Ed.), Battered women: A Psychosociological Study Of Domestic Violence (pp. 25-44). New York: VanNostrand Reinhold Company.

Straus, M.A. (1983). Ordinary Violence, Child Abuse, and Wife-Beating: What Do They Have In Common? In D. Finkelhor, R.J. Gelles, G.T. Hotaling, and M.A. Straus (Eds.), The Dark Side Of Families (pp. 213-234). Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Stuart, G.W. and Sundeen, S.J. (1983). Principles and Practices of Psychiatric Nursing (p. 459). St. Louis, Missouri: The C.V. Mosby Company.

Walker, L.E. (1983). The Battered Woman Syndrome Study. In D.

Finkelhor, R.J. Gelles, G.T. Hotaling, and M.A.Straus (Eds.), The Dark Side Of Families (p. 31-48). Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Yllo, K., and Straus, M.A. (1981). Interpersonal Violence Among Married And Cohabiting Couples. Family Relations, 30, 339-347.

Table 1

Scoring For Criterion Variables

Abuse Type

1	Emotional abuse or other threats
2	Threat by husband to kill wife
3	Use of hands / feet / fists
4	Use of hands / feet / fists with injury to woman
5	Use of object
6	Use of object with injury to woman
7	Sexual assault
8	Sexual assault with injury to woman
9	Presence of knife or cutting instrument during battering
10	Presence of knife or cutting instrument with injury to woman
11	Presence of gun during battering
12	Presence of gun with injury to woman

Abuse Frequency

2	Never
4	Once a year
6	3-4 times a year
8	Once a month
10	Once a week
12	Daily

Abuse Severity Determined by adding abuse type and abuse frequency scores.

Table 2

Results of Regression Analyses

Criterion Variable	Predictor Variable	β	R^2
Abuse Type	Drug or alcohol use by assailant **	.26	.11
Abuse Frequency	Victim employment *	.21	.07
Abuse Severity	1) Drug or alcohol use by assailant *	.24	.16
	2) Childhood sexual abuse of victim *	.21	

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$